

LOAD SECURING DEVICE AND METHOD FOR USING THE SAME

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/454,209 filed March 12, 2003, incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Field

5 The present inventive subject matter relates to the cargo securing arts. It finds particular application in conjunction with the securing of loads to flatbed trailers, and will be described with particular reference thereto. However, it is to be appreciated that it is also amenable to other like applications.

Background

10 Tie down devices and/or methods in general are commonly known and have been traditionally used for securing cargo onto the top surface of flatbed trailers. Known systems often employ one or more winches attached to a side of the trailer. A tie down line is attached at a first end to the winch so as to be selectively wound and unwound therefrom. The leading end of the line opposite
15 the first end is generally free to be extended from or retracted toward the winch and typically has a hook or the like arranged thereon. In operation, the leading end of the line is usually extended from the winch simply over (see, e.g., FIGURE 1) or alternately wrapped entirely around (see, e.g., FIGURE 2) a load situated on the trailer. The free end of the line is then anchored to the side of
20 the trailer opposite the winch (e.g., using the hook) and the winch is then employed to retract and/or otherwise apply tension on the line thereby tightening the same and securing the cargo. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,664,918, incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, discloses a similar type system.

25 Another system disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,941,665, incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, utilizes a series of strap pairs specifically for securing an automobile to a trailer by its tires. A first elongated strap of the pair

is attached to one side of the trailer. A second shorter strap of the pair having two loops at opposing ends is then placed at the outside of the vehicle tire. The first strap is then threaded through the first loop of the second strap, around the back of the tire, through the second loop of the second strap, then secured to the same side of the trailer.

While at times acceptable in certain situations and/or for some applications, the previously developed systems and/or techniques remain limited in various aspects. Often, problems are presented when the load to be secured is of irregular shape or size. Load securement is further complicated when the load includes a plurality of separate items that are stacked upon one another or otherwise arranged to be secured collectively by tie down lines. In such situations, various drawbacks may accompany the previously developed techniques, for example, due to friction, line binding or pinching, etc., when the line is tensioned from the one winch end. See, for example, FIGURES 1-6. Restrictions on the line's freedom to tension equally can create undesirable forces and/or torques on the load as a whole that may bias it in one direction or another to encourage unwanted shifting; or in the case of a plurality of items, unequal tensioning may result in forces and/or torques being unequally applied to each item, again potentially causing unwanted shifting.

As compared to the simple over the top approach, the wrap around approach better secures the load by providing more radially inward securing pressure around the entire outside of a load. However, the wrap around approach also tends to exhibit more uneven tensioning of the line due to increased friction and/or binding that results from greater surface area contact between the load and the line. This uneven tensioning results in uneven application of radially inward forces on the load which can tend to undesirably result in torque being applied to the load as a whole or one or more individual items of the load (see, e.g., FIGURES 2, 4 and 6). Alternately, while simply placing the line over the load may provide for more even tensioning as compared to the wrapped arrangement wherein the line encircles the load, the line-over approach can leave voids between the line and the load (see, e.g., FIGURES 1, 3A and 5) which can result in a greater potential for lateral

movement of the load with respect to the trailer bed, either from side-to-side or in the fore and/or aft directions. For example, when the line-over approach is taken, fore and aft movement may be even more likely with respect to the interior items of a multi-item load (see, e.g., FIGURES 3A and 3B); and in a stacked arrangement, a radial downward force on top items unopposed by a radial inward force on bottom outside items may tend to push the bottom items laterally outward (see, e.g., FIGURE 5). Even when the individual items are banded together, the resulting uneven and/or unwanted forces can unduly strain the band.

In short, the previously developed techniques and/or approaches create uneven tension along the lines due to friction, binding or like. Disadvantageously, this can result in certain forces and/or torques being developed that are either unwanted and/or undesirably unopposed, thereby creating an unstable load situation which can contribute to unsafe situations and/or which may add to the time and difficulty of suitably securing loads.

Therefore, the present inventive subject matter contemplates a new and improved cargo cinching device and/or method for using the same to produce a combination of direct and indirect cargo securement which overcomes the above-referenced problems and others.

Summary

In accordance with one aspect, a load securing device is provided with which a flexible tie down is engaged to secure a load to an object. The load securing device includes: a first mandrel that is substantially rigid; a second mandrel that is substantially rigid; and, a linkage joining the the first and second mandrels to one another.

In accordance with another aspect, a method of securing a load to an object includes: securing a first end of a line to the object; wrapping the line at least partially around a first substantially rigid mandrel at a first location on the line; wrapping a length of the line extending between the first location and a second location on the line at least partially around the load; wrapping the line at least partially around a second substantially rigid mandrel at the second location on the line, the second mandrel being connected to the first mandrel by

a linkage; securing a second end of the line to the object; and, removing any slack from the line.

Numerous advantages and benefits of the present inventive subject matter will become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art upon reading and understanding the present specification. For example, in accordance with one or more embodiments, an advantage is that applied tension to a tie down line can be beneficially distributed in a substantially even and/or equal manner along the length of the line insomuch as undesirable friction, bunching, chafing, binding and/or pinching of the line has been inhibited.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present inventive subject matter may take form in various components and arrangements of components, and in various steps and arrangements of steps. The drawings are only for purposes of illustrating preferred embodiments and are not to be construed as limiting the invention.

Further, it is to be appreciated that the drawings are not to scale.

FIGURE 1 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a rear elevation view of a single item load secured to a trailer deck in accordance with a conventional line-over-top-of-load approach.

FIGURE 2 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a rear elevation view of a single item load secured to a trailer deck in accordance with a conventional line-wrapped-around-entire-load approach.

FIGURES 3A and 3B are diagrammatic illustrations showing rear elevation views of multiple item single layer loads secured to a trailer deck in accordance with a conventional line-over-top-of-load securing approach.

FIGURE 4 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a rear elevation view of a multiple item single layer load secured to a trailer deck in accordance with a conventional line-wrapped-around-entire-load securing approach.

FIGURE 5 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a rear elevation view of a multiple item stacked layer load secured to a trailer deck in accordance with a conventional line-over-top-of-load securing approach.

FIGURE 6 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a rear elevation view of a multiple item stacked layer load secured to a trailer deck in accordance with a conventional line-wrapped-around-entire-load securing approach.

5 FIGURES 7A and 7B are diagrammatic illustrations showing partial perspective views of a load being secured to the deck of a trailer by two exemplary cargo securing systems in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter.

10 FIGURES 8-12 are diagrammatic illustrations showing rear elevation views of various types of loads secured to the deck of a trailer by exemplary cargo securing systems in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter.

15 FIGURE 13-15 are diagrammatic illustrations showing partial perspective views of various types of loads secured to the deck of a trailer by exemplary cargo securing systems in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter.

FIGURE 16 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a rear elevation view of a hollow load secured to a trailer deck in accordance with a conventional securing approach.

20 FIGURE 17 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a top plan view and a side elevation view taken along section line 1-1 of an exemplary cinching device in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter, with selected internal structures being depicted via dashed lines.

25 FIGURE 18 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a top plan view and a side elevation view taken along section line 2-2 of another exemplary cinching device in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter, with selected internal structures being depicted via dashed lines and one end cap omitted to expose certain internal features.

30 FIGURE 19 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a partial top plan view and side elevation views taken along section line 3-3, 4-4 and 5-5, respectively, of another exemplary cinching device in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter, with selected internal structures being depicted via dashed lines.

FIGURE 20 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a top plan view and a side elevation view taken along section line 6-6 of another exemplary cinching device in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter, with selected internal structures being depicted via dashed lines.

5 FIGURE 21 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a top plan view and a side elevation view taken along section line 7-7 of another exemplary cinching device in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter, with selected internal structures being depicted via dashed lines.

10 FIGURE 22 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a top plan view and a side elevation view taken along section line 8-8 (having divided mandrels in an open position) of another exemplary cinching device in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter, with selected internal structures being depicted via dashed lines.

15 FIGURE 23 is a diagrammatic illustration showing a top plan view and a side elevation view taken along section line 8-8 (having divided mandrels in an open position) of another exemplary cinching device in accordance with aspects of the present inventive subject matter, with selected internal structures being depicted via dashed lines.

Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiments

20 With reference to FIGURES 7A and 7B, a multiple item single layer load 100 is shown being secured to the deck 210 of a trailer 200 by one or more cooperating cargo securing systems 300 (two being shown here for simplicity and clarity of the present description). Each system 300 includes: a cinching device 310, a substantially flexible tie down line 320, and a tensioning device or
25 winch 330. The line 320 shown is a wider flat strap type suitably made of nylon or other material as is known in the art. Of course, other line types are alternately employed, e.g., including but not limited to: ropes, cords, chains, wire cables, synthetic webbing, or the like.

30 Suitably, the winch 330, as is known in the art, is attached to one side 220 of the trailer 200. The line 320 is attached at a first end to the winch 330 so as to be selectively wound and unwound therefrom. The leading end 322 of the

line **320** opposite the first end is generally free to be extended from or retracted toward the winch **330** and typically has a hook or the like arranged thereon.

When securing the load **100**, the line **320** extends from the winch **330** on side **220** of the trailer **200**, through the cinching device **310**, around the load **100**, back through the cinching device **310**, and to the side **230** of the trailer **200** opposite side **220** where the leading end **322** of the line **320** is anchored, e.g., via the hook arranged thereon. As shown, the load **100** optionally rests upon dunnage **110** arranged on the deck **210** of the trailer **200**. FIGURE **7A** shows the line **320** essentially untensioned. Operating the winch **330** so as to wind the line **320** thereon tightens the line **320** thereby constricting it about the load **100** (i.e., providing direct securement) and securing the load **100** to the deck **210** of the trailer **200** (i.e., providing indirect securement), as seen in FIGURE **7B**.

FIGURES **8-15** show the cargo securing system **300** being used in different variations of the same basic configuration to secure various different types of loads **100**. For example, as shown in FIGURE **15**, the winch **330** and the anchoring point for the leading end **322** of the line **320** connected thereto are on the opposite sides of the trailer **200**, yet are diagonally situated. For annular loads **100** having hollow centers (e.g., wire coils, rolls of metal, etc.), the lines **320** optionally pass through the hollow centers as shown in FIGURES **14** and **15**. However, the lines **320** are still wrapped around a portion of the annular ring to constrict thereabout. Also, in FIGURES **14** and **15**, inward radial compression is achieved on the load **100**, outside the normal plane of operation. Of particular note, as compared to a conventional load securing approach depicted in FIGURE **16**, the configuration of FIGURE **15** additionally provides an improvement in securement leverage of approximately 150%.

Suitably, the system **300** minimizes undesired friction, bunching, chafing, binding and/or pinching of the line **320** during tensioning while still advantageously providing radially inward constricting securement of the load **100**. Various features and/or aspects of the present system **300** aid in achieving the foregoing. For example, dunnage **110** is optionally used to raise the load **100** off the deck **210** permitting the lines **320** to move freely

therebetween. Additionally, the cinching device **310** also aids in achieving the foregoing.

FIGURES **17-23** show suitable embodiments of the cinching device **310** which includes a pair of substantially rigid mandrels **312** arranged at opposing ends **314** and **316** joined together by a linking portion **318**. Suitably, the mandrels **312** are constructed from steel, titanium, composite plastics or carbon fiber materials, or other materials as are known in the art that are sufficiently strong to provide proper working load limits. In the case of use with flammable or explosive cargo, non-ferrous metals (e.g., aluminum, brass, bronze, etc.) or other non-ferrous materials may be employed. When in use, the line **320** passes over and/or partially around each mandrel **312** which provides an engagement point therefor. That is to say, each mandrel **312** receives the line **320** and provides a point about which the direction of the line **320** is essentially reversed or otherwise changed. As the line **320** is wound onto the winch **330** or otherwise pulled tight, the mandrels **312** permit the line **320** to slide, rotate and/or otherwise traverse around themselves with minimal impedance. Accordingly, even tensioning of the line **320** on both sides of the load **100** is not hampered.

Suitably, to provide conformance to a surface of the load **100** upon which it is in contact when the cinching device **310** is used to secure the load **100**, the ends **314** and **316** are joined by a substantially flexible linking portion **318** such that they may move at least partially independent of one another with respect to one or more degrees of freedom. See, for example, FIGURES **17** and **19** wherein the linking portion **318** includes a pair of laterally spaced apart chains **318a** and **318b** that are joining the respective ends of the mandrels **312** together; and FIGURES **20-22** wherein the linking portion **318** includes a single chain link **318c** that joins opposing ends **314** and **316** of the cinching device **310**. Of course, other flexible linking portions are also contemplated, e.g., ropes, wire cables, cords, webbing or straps made of nylon or another suitable material, etc.

Referring to FIGURE **17**, in one embodiment of the cinching device **310**, the mandrels **312** are solid bolts including a bolt head end **312a** and an

opposing threaded end **312b**. The mandrels **312** are attached to the chains **318a** and **318b** by extending the threaded ends **312b** through end links of the chains **318a** and **318b**, then applying nuts (e.g., lock, nyloc, or other suitable types) **313** to the threaded ends **312b**. Optionally, a lynch, hair or cotter pin **315** is used to guard against the nuts **313** unscrewing. It is to be appreciated that the bolt head ends **312a** and the nuts **313** are dimensioned so as to not be able to pass through the end links of chains **318a** and **318b**. FIGURE 18 illustrates a similar embodiment except that the mandrels **312** are hollow heavy-walled pipes with retaining collars or end caps **312c** welded, press fit or otherwise attached to opposing ends to retain the end links of the chains **318a** and **318b** on the mandrels **312**.

FIGURE 19 shows an alternate embodiment of the cinching device **310** shown in FIGURE 18. In particular, the mandrels **312** are solid rods with integrally formed retaining collars or end caps **312c**. As best seen in detail **20'**, a cut out portion or recess **312d** is formed in one or more ends of the mandrels **312** such that one dimension of an end cross-section of the mandrel **312** is smaller than the end link's opening while a second dimension of the same end cross-section is larger than the end link's opening. Accordingly, when the mandrel **312** is selectively rotated with respect to the end link through which it is inserted, such that the recess **312d** is aligned with the link (i.e., 90 degrees rotated with respect to what is shown in FIGURE 19), the end link is able to shift or otherwise move over into the recess **312d** such that it may be removed over the end of the mandrel **312**; and, when the mandrel **312** is selectively rotated with respect to the end link through which it is inserted, such that the recess **312d** is not aligned with the link (i.e., as shown in FIGURE 19), the end link is not able to shift or otherwise move over into the recess **312d** such that it may not be removed over the end of the mandrel **312**. Suitably, once the load **100** is secured, the tension on the line **320** keeps the mandrels **312** from rotating to a degree which would permit their detachment from the chains **318a** and **318b**. Suitably, as shown, the cutout portion or recess **312d** is formed to be concave in shape. However, alternately, the cutout portion or recess **312d**

may be formed to be convex or linear in shape or have any other suitable shape.

With respect to FIGURES 17-19, suitably, the mandrels **312** are free to rotate or otherwise move within the openings of the end links through which they pass, subject to the retention imposed by the bolt head ends **312a**, nuts **313** and/or retaining collars or end caps **312c**. The rolling movement of the mandrels **312** in this respect serves to reduce the potential for undesired friction, bunching, chafing, binding and/or pinching of the line **320** during tensioning or as the line **320** is otherwise drawn around the mandrels **312**. Of course, optionally the mandrels **312** may be affixed to the chains **318a** and **318b**, e.g., by welding them to end links or the like.

As an additional measure, sheaths **317** (e.g., made of Teflon® or another like stiff plastic or other appropriate polymer material as is known in the art or a knurled steel or the like) are optionally provided over the mandrels **312**. Suitably, the sheaths **317** are free to rotate about the mandrels **312** (particularly in the case where the mandrels **312** are affixed to the chains **318a** and **318b**) to promote or further enhance the reduction of potential for undesired friction, bunching, chafing, binding and/or pinching of the line **320**. Additionally, the outer diameters of the sheaths **317** are suitably sized so as to be larger than an inner dimension of the end link openings, and they suitably extend substantially the entire length of the mandrels **312** (i.e., excluding the widths of the end links). Accordingly, the sheaths **317** further serve to retain the end links of the chains **318a** and **318b** at the ends of the mandrels **312**.

When used in connection with a strap type line **320**, it is to be appreciated that lengths of the mandrels **312** are suitably made to accommodate the width of the line **320** or they may be longer to accommodate angular operation, e.g., as shown in FIGURES 14 and 15. Additionally, the dimensions of clearances **319** are suitably larger than the thickness of the lines **320**. Accordingly, when the line **320** is wrapped around the mandrels **312** and the cinching device **310** is pulled tight against the load **100**, the line **320** is not pinched between the mandrels **312** and the load surface, i.e., the clearances

319 provide or otherwise leave room for the line **320** to move substantially uninhibited between the load **100** and the mandrels **312**.

FIGURE 20 shows yet another embodiment of the cinching device **310** exhibiting beneficially rolling mandrels **312**. The single chain link **318c** joins ends **314** and **316** which include forks **314a** and **316a**, respectively, each holding a corresponding rolling mandrel **312'** and **312''** on axles **314b** and **316b**. Suitably, the forks **314a** and **316a** are constructed from steel, titanium, composite plastics or carbon fiber materials, or other materials as are known in the art that are sufficiently strong to provide proper working load limits. In the case of use with flammable or explosive cargo, non-ferrous metals (e.g., aluminum, brass, bronze, etc.) or other non-ferrous materials may be employed. Optionally, as shown on the rolling mandrel **312'** a ratcheting mechanism is provided to selectively permit rolling in one direction (i.e., as shown, in the counter clockwise direction) while inhibiting rolling in the opposite direction (i.e., as shown, in the clockwise direction). The ratcheting mechanism is suitably housed within the rolling mandrel **312'** and includes a toothed surface **400** and a pivoting catch **410** biased (e.g., by a spring or gravity) against the toothed surface **400**. Suitably, the rolling mandrels **312'** and **312''** have outer surfaces formed so as to center one or more particular types of lines **320** thereon. As shown, for example, centrally on the outer surfaces, an annular channel is formed to receive lines **320** having substantially round cross sections, e.g., ropes, wire cables, cords, etc. Additionally, as shown, wider depressions formed in the outer surface periodically around the channel accommodate links of chain type lines **320**. The otherwise planar cylindrical surface of rolling mandrel **312'** still suitably accommodates flat strap type lines **320**. Alternately, as shown on the rolling mandrel **312''**, the outer surface is progressively sloped toward the centrally located channel to bias non-strap type lines **320** toward the center of the mandrel **312''** when they are pulled tight about the same.

With respect to the embodiment of FIGURE 21, the illustrated cinching device **310** has a more simplified construction with the single chain link **318c** joining ends **314** and **316** that include forks **314a** and **316a**, respectively, each

having a corresponding non-rolling mandrel surface **312'''** integrally formed therewith. Each mandrel surface **312'''** is suitably defined as a partial half-pipe that is curved or bent along its longitudinal axis. That is to say, the mandrel surface **312'''** can be conceptualized as a surface segment of a toroid corresponding to a partial rotation of a concave curve segment about the axis of the toroid, the curve segment being concave relative to the axis of the toroid. Suitably, the mandrel surface **312''** is also symmetrical about two mutually orthogonal bisecting planes, e.g., as shown, the mandrel surface **312''** is symmetrical about the x-y plane bisecting it, and it is symmetrical about the x-z plane bisecting it. In this manner, the cinching device **300** realizes a self-aligning characteristic, i.e., the shape of the mandrel surfaces **312'''** provide a biasing force which urges the line **320** and/or the mandrel surfaces **312'''** to center on one another when the line **320** is pulled tight across the mandrel surfaces **312'''**.

As will be appreciated upon further reading of this specification, the embodiments of FIGURE 22 and FIGURE 23 beneficially employ divided or otherwise selectively splittable mandrels **312**. In particular, the FIGURE 22 embodiment employs forks similar to FIGURE 20, except that each fork is divided into separate independent frames **314a'** and **314a''** and **316a'** and **316a''**, each frame having attached thereto a respective mated half of the mandrels **312**. Alternately, FIGURE 23 shows another type of split mandrel cinching device **310** wherein the link portion **318** includes two frames **318d** and **318e** joined together pivotally about a formed rivet **500**, each frame **318d** and **318e** having attached thereto at respective ends corresponding mated halves of the mandrels **312**. As shown in FIGURE 23, each mandrel **312** is cylindrical in shape, such that each divided part thereof corresponds to half a cylinder; and as shown in FIGURE 22, the left mandrel **312** is half-cylindrical in shape, such that each divided part thereof corresponds to a quarter cylinder, and the right mandrel **312** is shaped like the mandrel surface **312'''**, such that each divided part thereof corresponds to half of the same. Again, the frames are suitably constructed of material similar to the mandrels **312** and/or the forks.

Mated halves of the mandrels **312** are suitably provided with alignment and/or locking fixtures **600**. Each fixture **600** includes a pin **610** (or optionally a plurality of pins) and a recess **620** (or optionally a plurality of recesses) arranged on opposing mated halves of the mandrels **312**. The recess **620** and pin **610** are arranged and/or dimensioned so that the recess **620** receives the pin **610** in close fitting relationship to one another when the mandrel halves are joined together. When the mandrel halves are joined together and the line **320** is looped over and pulled tight about the same, the fixtures **600** in conjunction with the line **320** hold the mandrels **312** together.

With reference again to FIGURES **7A** and **7B**, depending on the embodiment of the cinching device **310** employed, two exemplary methods are proposed for securing the load **100** to the deck or bed **210** of the trailer **200** with the cargo securing system **300**, nominally termed herein a threading method and a slack-gathering method. Suitably, the threading method is used in conjunction with cinching devices **310** that do not have divided mandrels **312** or that do not have mandrels **312** that are detachable from the linking portion **318**; and the slack-gathering method is used in conjunction with cinching devices **310** that do have divided mandrels **312** (see, e.g., FIGURES **22** and **23**) or that do have mandrels **312** that are detachable from the linking portion **318** (see, e.g., FIGURE **19**).

The threading method suitably begins with the load **100** already resting on the deck **210** and raised therefrom by the dunnage **110**, and with the line **320** unanchored to the side **230** of the trailer **200**. Suitably, at the beginning of the threading method, the line **320** is mostly or entirely unwound from the winch **330** or otherwise a sufficient amount of the line **320** is drawn from the winch **330** and placed clear of the deck **210** and/or load **100**. The leading end **322** of the lines **320** is then threaded through the cinching device **310** from the top and adjacent the first mandrel **312** (i.e., the mandrel **312** which is the closer of the two to the winch **330**). While drawing out the line **320** through the cinching device **310**, the leading end **322** is then passed around the load **100** between the deck **210** and the load **100** such that the line **320** at least partially encircles the load **100**. Next, the leading end **322** of the line **320** is again threaded

through the cinching device **310**, this time from the bottom and adjacent the second mandrel **312** (i.e., the mandrel **312** which is the further of the two from the winch **330**). While drawing out the line **320** down past the first mandrel **312**, around the load **100** and up past the second mandrel **312**, the leading end **322** is extended to the side **230** of the trailer **200** where it is anchored, suitably, opposite the winch **330** arranged on the side **220** of the trailer **200**.

Optionally, if not already so located, the cinching device **310** is positioned at or near the top center of the load **100**. Next, the winch **330** is operated to retract any slack in the line **320** and apply the desired tension thereto. As can now be appreciated, the applied tension is beneficially distributed in a substantially even and/or equal manner along the length of the line **320** insomuch as undesirable friction, bunching, chafing, binding and/or pinching of the line **320** has been minimized by the use of the herein described system **300** and/or method.

In contrast to the threading method, the slack-gathering method begins with drawing out from the winch **330** a projected amount of line **320** sufficient for the size of the load **100** to be secured. The leading edge **322** of the line **320** is then anchored to the side **230** of the trailer **200**. Beneficially, as will be appreciated upon further reading of the present specification, the leading edge **322** of the line **320** may be permanently or semi-permanently affixed to the side **230** of the trailer **200**, and/or may attach thereto via a second winch **330** arranged on the side **230** of the trailer **200**.

The drawn out line **320** is then laid across the deck **210** substantially parallel to the dunnage **110** arranged thereon. Suitably, nearly equal amounts of slack in the line **320** are left to hang over both sides **220** and **230** of the trailer **200** or otherwise. The load **100** is now placed on the deck **210** so as to be raised therefrom by the dunnage **110**. The slack on both sides of the load **100** is gathered so as to form a loop at or near a midpoint in each length of slack. Suitably, the loops are then drawn up and around their respective sides of the load **100** so that they meet at or near the top center of the load **100** where they are engaged by the cinching device **310**.

Initially, the cinching device **310** is presented for acceptance of the loops, i.e., in the case of a divided mandrel cinching device **310** (see, e.g., FIGURES **22** and **23**), the mandrels **312** are in an open position or otherwise separated, and in the case of a detachable mandrel cinching device **310** (see, e.g., FIGURE **19**), the mandrels **312** are separated. Then, the loops are positioned in respective ends **314** and **316** of the cinching device **310** and the mandrels **312** are closed around the loops, or inserted through the loops and reattached, as the case may be, such that the line **320** engages each mandrel **312** on its respective side.

Optionally, if not already so located, the cinching device **310** is positioned at or near the top center of the load **100**. Next, the winch **330** (or both winches **230**, if a second one is provided on the side **230** of the trailer **200**) are selectively operated to retract any slack in the line **320** and apply the desired tension thereto. As can now be appreciated, the applied tension is beneficially distributed in a substantially even and/or equal manner along the length of the line **320** insomuch as undesirable friction, bunching, chafing, binding and/or pinching of the line **320** has been minimized by the use of the herein described system **300** and/or method.

Furthermore, it is to be appreciated that the use of a divided or detachable mandrel cinching device **310** in conjunction with the slack-gathering method described herein enables the elimination of the free end **322** on line **320**. That is to say, both ends of the line **320** can optionally remain attached to the sides of the trailer while the load **100** is being placed on and secured to the trailer **200**. Accordingly, there is the option for the second winch **330** allowing for pulling from both ends of the line **320** and thereby achieving a more even and/or equal application of tension.

Additionally, while not illustrated, any of the foregoing embodiments is optionally equipped with a secondary tether or a locking mechanism that may be used to tie and/or lock the cinching device **310** down to prevent loss, theft, etc. Suitably, however, the tether and/or locking mechanism does not otherwise interfere with the operation of the cinching device **310** as described herein.

It is to be appreciated that in connection with the particular exemplary embodiments presented herein certain structural and/or function features are described as being incorporated in and/or with defined elements and/or components. However, it is contemplated that these features may similarly be incorporated in and/or with other elements and/or components and/or in the other various embodiments where appropriate. For example, the depressions, channels and/or slopes formed in the mandrel surfaces shown in FIGURE 20 may likewise be found on the outer surfaces of the sheaths 317 to the same or similar benefit.

It is also to be appreciated that different aspects of the exemplary embodiments may be selectively mixed and matched as appropriate to achieve other alternate embodiments suited for desired applications, the other alternate embodiments thereby realizing the respective advantages of the aspects incorporated therein. For example, a cinching device 310 may include any two different or like mandrel types selected from any of the exemplary embodiments presented herein.

Additionally, it is to be appreciated that certain elements described herein as incorporated together may under suitable circumstances be stand alone elements or otherwise divided. Similarly, a plurality of particular functions described as being carried out by one particular element may be carried out by a plurality of distinct elements acting independently to carry out individual functions, or certain individual functions may be split-up and carried out by a plurality of distinct elements acting in concert. Alternately, some elements or components otherwise described herein as distinct from one another may be physically or functionally combined where appropriate.

In short, the invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments. Obviously, modifications and alterations will occur to others upon reading and understanding the present specification. It is intended that the invention be construed as including all such modifications and alterations insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.

What is claimed is: